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Imagine the history of the galaxy with respect to extraterrestrial intelligence. Very early there were only first generation stars, no heavy metals and therefore no possibility of life, much less intelligence. That's Stage One. In Stage Two planets with heavy metals form from the starstuff processed in the previous generation of stars, life arises and evolves, but it's quite some time before a technical intelligence develops. In Stage Three, radiotelescopes are invented, radio contact among various technical civilizations is established, and some interstellar spaceflight. In Stage Four, the Galaxy has been crisscrossed by intelligence many times; it is linked up spiral arm to spiral arm and becomes on some level a cultural unity in the same sense as is happening just now on Earth. There is a Stage Five and higher stages but they involve other galaxies and so on, and don't affect us here. Now, where in this sequence of stages is our Galaxy today? Is it in Stage Two or in Stage Three?

"I think we're deep in Stage Three," said the Nigerian.